

Overview

Qualified Bilingual Staff (QBS) represent a critical link to providing effective communication and quality care to the limited-English proficient (LEP) communities and individuals we serve. Publically funded mental health and developmental services agencies are required to provide meaningful access for all individuals receiving services, their authorized representatives/court appointed legal guardians, to allow them to make informed decisions, and equal access to services provided by the agency in compliance with the Code of Virginia §51.5-40 - Nondiscrimination under state grants and programs, the federal laws: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and other federal and state regulations.

QBS is a program that allows for in the moment interpretation from someone who has been certified competent in their ability to assist in communication with someone who has LEP when an interpreter isn't available or while arrangements are being made for an interpreter. The QBS model can be a key strategic initiative with the goal of ensuring meaningful language access at THE ORGANIZATION. The model leverages and invests in internal expertise.

As an organization, there are several resources that are available to facilitate communication with non- or limited-English proficient members. The following illustrates the various resources and their relative impact on members' quality of care if used as health care interpreters:



The National Qualified Bilingual Staff Model, effective communication is viewed as a non-linear process. Providers and staff can be effective in utilizing their linguistic skills if encounters are matched appropriately with the level of skills. For example, a Level 1 individual would be considered qualified if functioning within the defined scope of practice in a non-clinical setting.

* National Diversity, National Linguistic & Cultural Programs 2000.

QBS are NOT replacements for interpreters or translators, which require different training and certification. All of these are considered separate components of your language services toolbox to be used at different times based on the level of communication needed during a particular encounter with a patient.

Core Training Elements

The QBS Model & Program were designed by Kaiser Permanente National Diversity & Inclusion and adapted by DBHDS to capitalize on an organization's existing workforce diversity and ensure qualified linguistic services and culturally competent care at every point of contact. DBHDS adaptation is specifically designed to build terminology in behavioral health, substance abuse, and developmental services setting and discuss the unique role that bilingual staff may have interpreting in these settings. This model has been recognized by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the California Endowment, and award winner from the National Committee for Quality Assurance and the Migration Policy Institute. It has been successfully implemented in healthcare settings in Georgia, California, and the Mid-Atlantic States. Two hundred bilingual providers and staff have been trained since the program was implemented at DBHDS in 2011.

Course Content

Levels 1 and 2 are classroom portions offered by the Office of Cultural and Linguistic Competency (OCLC) period for a total of 24 hours of didactic instruction and all candidates must attend. This program is focused on introducing theory and practice. The content of these two levels include:

- legal and regulatory requirements on language access
- diversity and cultural competence
- effective communication strategies
- modes of interpreting
- basic concepts of interpreting
- roles and responsibilities as a “dual role” staff
- standards of practice
- ethical issues and code of ethics and
- common concepts and terminology used in our practice setting
- review of the target language assessment

Proficiency Testing

Every bilingual staff member in this program must also be assessed for competence in the target language called the QBS Assessment. This language assessment was developed and is administered by ALTA Language Services. This telephonic assessment determines the level of both English and target language proficiency. Specifically the QBS Assessment is designed to assess a staff members' ability to directly communicate with target-language speaking individuals in practice settings. The assessment is available in 19 languages.

It should be stated that about 30 percent of those who believe they are proficient did not pass the QBS Assessment. This fact demonstrates and reinforces the need for an organization to have a formal process in place to ensure that only staff who are qualified and assessed are authorized to conduct any type of interpretation for the organization.

When an organization implements the QBS program, they will decide when they want the staff member to take the test. Options include before or after taking the classroom portion. There are advantages and disadvantages to doing the proficiency prior to or after the classroom course and is typically been left up to the staff member to decide when they wish to be assessed, although this could be determined by the organization.

QBS Level Competencies and Scope of Practice

QBS Level 1 (L1): Employees use basic conversation skills within their regular job or by providing language assistance for another individual. QBS Level 1 is what we consider a Language Liaison (L1). They have the language ability to do the following things:

- Ability to converse in English and in the language of service (LOS)
- Ability to provide directions and simple instructions in English and LOS
- Ability to provide customer services types of interpreting where knowledge of medical terminology/concepts is not required.

QBS Core Competencies

- The QBS L1 is able to use LOS to directly communicate or interpret in the following situations:
- Handling appointments
- Taking complaints and/or grievances
- Providing location-based directions
- Providing non-medical instructions, such as, basic business forms
- Performing sight translation within the customer service parameters from English into the target language

QBS Level 2 (L2) is considered a Language Facilitator. It is an employee that uses a much higher proficiency of language skills within their regular job or by providing language assistance for another individual

- Meets level one's (L1) requirements
- Ability to use English and LOS within the scope of practice in a clinical setting
- Ability to provide simple interpreting in various healthcare settings

QBS Core Competencies

- The QBS L2 is able to use LOS to directly communicate or interpret in the following situations:
- Providing simple medically and/or non-medically related instructions within scope of practice
- Providing health care interpreting in simple/routine clinical encounters

- Performing simple sight translation from English into the target language

Responsibility for the QBS Program

The OCLC provides technical support, implementation consultation, interpreter proficiency testing, and QBS training supported by Kaiser Permanente and other nationally recognized healthcare organizations.

A coordinator and/or team should be responsible for ensuring accountability, regularly scheduled supervision, and continued development of the Qualified Bilingual (QB) staff and overall program. Ideally, this program should consist of one person from management, one person from Training, and one person from HR, however; it is up to each organization to create a team that will best support the QBS Program. The organization will be responsible for enforcing the use of only QBS for interpretation and training staff to recognize the value of such protocol as well as effective strategies for communicating through QBS. The OCLC can provide such training through classroom, virtual, or written training material.

Cost of Program

The training can be conducted on-site to organizations who are implementing the full program at no charge. The proficiency test fee is \$60-100 and is the responsibility of the organization. *Currently, OCLC has funding to pay for the proficiency tests for organizations implementing the program. This is not ongoing funding and is on a first come first served basis.*

Organizations are discovering that recruitment and retention efforts can be enhanced when bilingual skills are seen as additional skill sets that are compensated with a differential. Many organizations are offering a monthly differential for bilingual staff who use their language skills outside of their regular job role such as a QBS role. This would be an additional cost and a decision to be made by the organization.

If the organization is not implementing or operating a QBS program and wants to send individual staff to a training offered in another location, the cost of the training is \$75 per person.

Determining Languages to Be Covered

In order to make this program cost effective, it is recommended that the top five languages for which we require formal interpretive services for be recruited for the initial project implementation. It is understood that the top five languages can change over time so it will be the responsibility of the organization's QBS program to do community mapping to monitor changes and recruit for applicable prevalent languages. Possible exceptions might be something like evidence of a growing language.

Procedure for QBS Recruitment and Training

1. The organization's QBS program can send a communication out to all staff to recruit bilingual staff who speak one of the five top languages and who have an interest in becoming a QBS.
2. A formal application will be used in the process and it will include the five languages being sought. Initially, only applications from staff who wish to be qualified in these languages will be considered.
3. Additional requirements on the application will include a good attendance history, no active written notices, performance rating of contributor or higher on last evaluation, completion of the probationary period or within two months of completion, and permission of the supervisor.
4. The QBS Program will review all applications for appropriateness into the program.
5. Arrangements will be made for the OCLC to come to the organization to conduct the training. If it's not possible for the OCLC to come to the organization and training is being offered elsewhere in the COV, sending staff will be considered contingent upon available funding.
6. If the staff member wishes to wait until completion of the classroom class, they will have 45 calendar days after completion of the classroom course in which to take the language assessment (the organization can determine the timeline for testing).
7. If OCLC is NOT paying for the language tests, the organization would create an account with ALTA. Once they contact ALTA, the employee will set up a time and a date to take the test and will call in to take the test on the phone. The assessment may be conducted utilizing a telephone and computer. The staff member will need a quiet place to do the assessment which is a speaking and listening test that is validated through a private vendor.
8. Upon completion of the assessment, ALTA will send a final assessment report to the designated recipient. The recipient will share with the OCLC and the OCLC will generate a Certificate of Completion to the staff member who will provide a copy to the Training Department for entry into their training transcript and a copy to the QBS Program for the organization's records maintenance.
9. Once the Certificate is received, the staff member may participate in QBS activities.
10. The QBS Program will maintain a list of QB staff and the languages they speak.

Continuing Quality Assurance

The QBS coordinator and/or team should develop a mechanism to determine how QBS are utilized in the organization. This is especially important for QBS who are tested to be a QBS level one and have limited proficiency skills. Agency staff should be trained in the difference between the two levels and how to utilize the QBS. OCLC can support this effort through live and webinar training as well as fact sheets and other information dissemination tools. QBS coordinators and/or teams should develop a process to monitor and audit the communication effectiveness of QBS on a routine basis.

OCLC will also develop opportunities for QBS to participate in continuing education training in which they can further develop terminology and skill sets related to being QBS.

More information

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